



Published December 21st, 2022

## Holiday safety tips from fire and police departments

By Vera Kochan

Winter holidays are a time for family gatherings, colorful decorations, warm fireplaces, gift-giving, ski vacations and cocktails. It's also the time of year when local fire districts and police departments want residents to be especially mindful of safety risks and seasonal hazards that could turn an otherwise celebratory time of year into a tragedy.

According to the Moraga-Orinda Fire District website, folks should be wary when using candles during the holidays as more than half of home decoration fires in December are started by candles with Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day being the three top days for usage. Never place candles near anything that will burn, extinguish candles before leaving a room, and never leave children alone with lit candles. A safe alternative is to use flameless candles.

Christmas trees are a major part of the holidays, but MOFD warns against placing them in areas that block hallways, exit ways or doors. Also, make sure not to place them near heating ducts, fireplaces, candles, lanterns or heaters. Christmas trees are attributed in causing 1 in every 4 winter fires. The tree's water level should be checked daily to avoid over-drying, and once the tree has dried, remove it from the home.

A glowing fireplace is a cozy feature of the holidays, but always make certain that any decorations and flammable materials are nowhere near it. Once the presents are opened, the house is littered with wrapping paper, boxes and other trash. MOFD advises residents not to burn these in a fireplace. Ink from the paper can give off toxic fumes, and when burning papers float up the chimney they can ignite creosote deposits in the flue.

Colored lights are a popular part of the holiday season. Keep yourself safe while climbing a ladder by making sure it is centered and you are able to reach your goal without falling off. Before even hanging the lights, look for frayed wires, damaged bulb sockets and worn insulation. It's equally important not to overload an outlet with too many lights. Make certain to use outdoor rated extension cords outside. Plug them into a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupting (GFCI) outlet.

An Advisory Message from local police departments includes tips for a safe season by warning holiday shoppers to be mindful of their surroundings. Criminals may hang around ATMs and banks to spot folks who have withdrawn large amounts of cash. If you suspect that you are being targeted, lock your doors and windows, call 9-1-1, flag down an officer, or drive to the nearest police department.

Also, never leave a purse or bag on the seat of your car in plain sight. You are just making a thief's Christmas shopping easier and less expensive for him/her. Lock your car when you leave it, and stash valuables in the trunk (this includes unvaluables such as gym bags - they don't know it's just your smelly workout clothes until they've broken your car's window).

If you go away for the holidays, either for an extended vacation or just the weekend, make sure to lock your house (doors and windows), set an alarm, hide valuables (jewelry), and use timers on your lights set to various hours for the appearance of someone being home. Ask a neighbor to keep an eye on your house, and never "broadcast" in public or on social media when and how long you will be gone. Just assume that the walls have ears.

Local police warn people to be aware of scams either through phone calls or emails. Reputable institutions such as Pacific Gas & Electric will never call to say a bill is past due. No legitimate company or agency accepts payment over the phone via gift card or Green Dot card. When receiving an email from someone you don't know, or even a company that you have done legitimate business with, asking for a payment that you are suspicious of, never open any attachments or click onto any links. Instead, find a phone number to these businesses that was not included in the email, and call to verify the problem (if there was one).

The area has been experiencing some much needed rainfall, and the Moraga Police Department reminds drivers to slow down, don't get distracted, and drive defensively. Holiday celebrating often involves alcohol. If you are going to revel with spirits other than those of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, make sure to have a designated driver in your group or call a ride service. "Do not drive under the influence .even if you're just feeling buzzed."

Reach the reporter at: [vera@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:vera@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA